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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effectiveness of a Maryland State Compensatory Reading Program at the middle school level. Specifically, the study attempted to determine the effects of silent reading practice on reading achievement and on student attitudes toward reading. Subjects were 74 sixth, seventh, and eighth grade students in a compensatory reading program that incorporated silent reading practice with daily reading instruction. The Metropolitan Achievement Tests and attitude and interest surveys served as pretest-posttest instruments. The data revealed mean gains in reading and total reading scores that were greater than the results of chance. Growth in grade level equivalent ranged from a .7 to a 2.2 yearly gain. The Pearson Product correlation coefficient revealed no correlation to be significant for the reading subtest scores; however, a .61 correlation was significant at the .05 level for total reading achievement. The attitude survey results showed an increase of 17% in the amount of spare time that students spent reading. Student questionnaires overwhelmingly stated a feeling of improvement in reading ability, with 81% indicating an attitude change toward reading. Parents and teachers also reported support for the program. Thus, the study supported the belief that reading increases a reader's knowledge about reading itself. (RL)

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# The Effect of Silent Reading Practice on Reading Achievement and Attitudes in Reading

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# The Effect of Silent Reading Practice on Reading Achievement and Attitudes in Reading

The focus of instruction in education has always evolved around the "3 R's - Reading, Writing, and Arithmetic." Today, the increased emphasis on competency-based education and mastery of basic functional skills has influenced the development of compensatory education programs to achieve these goals. Teachers are continually striving to meet the needs of the individual learners in their classrooms. Are compensatory education programs meeting the needs of the students they serve by increasing reading achievement? How are these programs organized, in terms of instructional methods and learning environment to promote achievement?

The purpose of this study is to investigate the effectiveness of a Maryland State Compensatory Reading Program at the middle school level in terms of reading achievement gains obtained by students and their attitudes toward reading. Specifically, this study will attempt to answer two research questions:

1) What is the effect of silent reading practice incorporated with daily reading instruction on reading achievement of middle school students?
2) What is the effect of silent reading practice on attitudes toward reading of middle school students?

Clarification of Terms

Frank Smith (1978) describes reading as an active process of communication, whereby the reader brings meaning to print through the use of nonvisual and visual information. Smith's main instructional implication is that "Children learn to read by reading" (Smith, 1978, p.3). Drills, exercises, and rote learning, according to Smith (1978), play only a small role in helping children learn to read. Smith (1978) views reading as a learning activity within itself, that increases the knowledge of a reader about the process of reading with each practice of reading. The function of the teacher is viewed as not so much as one to teach reading, as one to help children read.

In this investigation, the definition of reading will be based on the philosophy of Frank Smith (1978), and should be interpreted as the process where the learner is actively engaged in deriving meaning from print through interaction with a variety of materials. Compensatory reading programs should be noted as special reading instruction provided for students identified as reading one or more years below grade level. Silent reading practice will refer to a scheduled period of daily instructional time involving the student in free selection of available reading materials for independent reading experience. Reading achievement will ascribe to the amount of improvement demonstrated by the student on the state required Metropolitan Achievement Test in the areas of comprehension and total reading ability. The term middle school will pertain to students assigned to the sixth, seventh, and eighth grades.

The Objective of Reading Instruction

The pressure for accountability in education has influenced the amount of skills verification checklists to be completed by the classroom teacher. It seems that teachers are tending to be losing focus as to what is the main purpose of their instruction in reading skills. Is this instruction an end in itself? What are the goals of reading instruction?

Karlin (1971) summarizes a comprehensive reading curriculum as one that provides for the development of basic reading skills, teaches children to use reading as a tool for learning, and fosters appreciation in literature; building permanent interests in reading. The goal of skill instruction then, is to develop fluent readers who enjoy reading. Strickler and Eller (1976) noted that often students spend many hours per week engaged in activities designed to develop and refine their skills in reading, but are afforded little opportunity within the schoolday to actually use these reading skills to pursue their own reading interests. Classrooms that have an overemphasis on skill development may be conveying to students that it is the isolated skill mastery that is valued, rather than the application of the skill to reading. Strickler and Eller (1976) reported that children derive clues as to what is valued, by the amount of time allotted for an activity. If books are made available to students and specific time given for reading books is offered only on a haphazard basis, then reading may tend to be viewed as an activity not worthy of much attention by students. In reference to these attitudes, the conjecture could be made that this inattention and perhaps, frank dislike of

reading as an activity, is a reflection on the process by which students have been exposed to and experienced print during reading instruction. This hypothesis is supported by the study of Strickler and Eller (1976) in their conclusion that

> if children are to develop attitudes toward reading that result in an interest in reading and in personally constructive reading habits, they need other reading-related experiences, in addition to direct instruction in reading skills (p. 450).

Reading instruction should have an inherent value for the learner. Duffy, Sherman, and Roehler (1977) state

> the true test of reading instruction is whether children use their learned skills when the teacher is not providing guidance; whether children read books on their own (p. 307).

Reading should display for the learner a purpose for the skills being learned. These skills should have a functional value. Students in Maryland are expected to pass with 80% proficiency a functional reading test, testing their reading ability in the areas of locating references, understanding forms, gaining information, and following directions. In a report by the Maryland State Department of Education (1978), an assessment of the state goals in reading was examined. The purpose of the functional reading test is to survey students' achievement in the state goals of:

1. utilization of a variety of reading materials
2. selection of reading as a personal activity
3. use of a word recognition system

4. comprehension of various reading materials

5. meeting the reading demands for functioning in society (p. 2)

J. Estill Alexander (1979) views a successful reading program as one that fosters students who can and do read. Two major objectives of a reading program proposed by Alexander (1979) are the development and maintenance of favorable attitudes toward reading and the fostering of a lasting interest in reading for personal and informational reasons (p. 315).

Sustained Silent Reading

Smith (1979) cites two basic necessities for learning to read; "the availability of interesting material that makes sense to the learner and an understanding adult as a guide" (p. 5). Hunt (1970) designated the method of self-selection of books read for an uninterrupted period of time as Uninterrupted Sustained Silent Reading (USSR). Tierney, Readence, and Dishner (1980) outline the generally recognized objectives of USSR as:

1. To provide students with a quiet time to practice their silent reading
2. To provide students with models of good silent reading behavior
3. To increase students' abilities to sustain silent reading for longer periods of time (p. 120).

McCracken and McCracken (1978) suggested that the use of USSR promotes positive images about books to students, relating messages that stress the importance of books and that reading is a process of communicating with an author.

This method of silent reading supplies students with an unthreatening situation, where they are not held responsible for materials read. The reluctant reader is thus given an opportunity to see reading as a pleasurable task, rather than as a negative experience. Students involved in a compensatory reading program are often the reluctant readers in a classroom because of their inability to read and complete classroom assignments successfully. How does this practice of silent reading, which incorporates the ideas and objectives of reading of Smith (1978) effect students' attitudes and achievements in reading?

## Review of Literature

Moore, Jones, and Miller (1980) examined research studies in the area of sustained silent reading. They reported that most of the studies covered short time spans of usage of the method, as well as little consistency in length and extent of practice. Miller et al. (1980) disclosed the following conclusions:

1. Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) has a positive effect on regular classroom students' attitudes toward reading. Studies by Pfau (1966), Lawson (1968), Wilmot (1975), and Langford (1978) were found to confirm SSR to have a positive effect on reading attitude.
2. SSR has a positive effect on reading ability when combined with a regular program of reading instruction. The study of Wilmot (1975) was cited to attest to this conclusion in reading comprehension. Lawson (1968) and Pfau (1966) also substantiated this fact.

3. More research is needed in SSR. Long term studies, a search for negative factors, and a determination of the best combination of SSR and formal instruction were suggestions for further study by Miller et al. (p. 448).

Shalaway (1980) discussed a joint study by the Federal Reserve Bank and a school district in Philadelphia in a recent issue of Instructor. In a study involving 2,000 fourth grade student achievement records and test scores, silent independent reading was noted as an important factor in improving reading achievement. Einhorn (1979) surveyed the effects of SSR on student reading habits in a fifth grade suburban parochial school. An experimental design was set up, involving three teachers and 81 students. During a daily 15 minute period of time, the experimental group used class, library, and student reading materials for silent reading practice. The control group used various reading kits. Both groups kept a record of their reading. After 10 weeks, results tabulated from the Estes Reading Attitude Scales revealed no significant difference in the total number of books and pages read between the groups.

In another study by Reed (1978), secondary students in 61 English classes participated in a five-and-a-half month study in silent reading practice. Fourteen English teachers and students in grades nine through twelve were assigned to either an experimental or control treatment. The experimental group received four days of traditional instruction and one day of SSR each week. The control group underwent five days of traditional class instruction. Reed concluded no statistically

significant relationship between treatment and reading comprehension or attitudes toward reading.

It has been noted by Moore et al. that SSR research has been lacking at the secondary level, and fragmented in terms of consistency and length of practice studied. The purpose of this research is then to extend the study of SSR into the middle school level, in particular with middle school students involved in a compensatory reading lab situation, where SSR has been consistently practiced daily throughout the school year. The proposed hypothesis of this study is that SSR, the independent variable, will effect reading attitudes and reading achievement, the dependent variables.

## Method

### Subjects

The subjects in this study are students from the sixth, seventh, and eighth grades in one of the six middle schools located in Charles County. Charles County is a rural county in Southern Maryland, 32 miles from Washington, D.C. Charles County has a total school enrollment of approximately 18,000 students. This study was conducted at General Smallwood Middle School, which is in the vicinity of the U.S. Naval Ordnance Station, the county's largest industry. The enrollment of General Smallwood is 680 students, of which 45% are Black.

The students were assigned to the compensatory reading program, which was part of the Title I program, "Operation Step-Up," on the basis of their Iowa and Metropolitan Achievement tests scores. These students had been identified as corrective readers, reading two or more years below grade placement. Selection of students was determined

through analysis of class schedules and test scores. Students with the lowest reading scores of a class section of students were to attend the lab during their regular reading class period. Seventy-four students participated in the study; 44 boys and 30 girls. In reference to grade distribution, 25 sixth graders, 34 seventh graders, and 15 eighth graders made up the total subject population. The teacher involved was a reading specialist, with a Master's degree in Reading and five years of teaching experience.

Procedure

In September, students were introduced to classroom procedures and sequence of daily instruction. The students were assigned to the lab on a daily basis for 50 minutes of instruction. Students were instructed to read silently at the beginning of the period for 10 minutes. They could select their reading materials from the classroom library, which consisted of books from various publishers such as Random House, Scholastic, and Xerox, as well as from the school library, or books from their personal library. Guidelines for silent reading were established, outlining free selection of materials, importance of silence for this time, and the recording of material read. Students were asked to maintain a personal reading log, detailing the date, title of material read, and number of pages read per day. The teacher practiced silent reading also during this time, modeling reading for the students. The purpose of the reading log was to increase students' awareness of books and materials read. The logs were also to be used as discussion aids in book sharing conferences and sessions on selected Fridays of each month.

A pre-test attitude and interest survey was given the first week of school, based on questions developed by Howard County and published in a Maryland functional reading guide of activities for teachers. The students were tested in early October with the Metropolitan Achievement Test, Form F, to establish a base pre-test score in accordance with state guidelines.

Class size averaged 12 students per class period. Students were provided with individualized and group instruction based on needs diagnosed through formal and informal methods of evaluation. Emphasis in instruction was given to the areas of vocabulary, comprehension, study skills, and functional reading. Teaching methods, such as the Directed Reading Thinking Activity; the Directed Reading Activity; and the Language Experience Approach were used weekly in instruction. A variety of instructional materials were utilized, such as the Barnell Loft Specific Skill Series, Scholastic Action Series, Audio Reading Progress Lessons, and Be a Better Reader texts. Effort was made to contact the regular classroom teacher on a quarterly basis to discuss student and program development. Monthly evaluation reports were provided for the parents to outline student mastery of individual reading skill objectives. Parent-teacher conferences were organized in addition to school Parent Teacher Association meetings for each grade reporting period.

In March 1980, a parent and student survey developed by the State Compensatory math teacher, Julia Habash, and the State Compensatory reading teacher, Dennise Bartelo, was distributed. In May 1980, students were post-tested, using the Metropolitan Achievement Test, Form G.

Teachers were contacted to evaluate the program through a questionnaire, and students submitted a post-attitude survey.

Results

An analysis of the data of the available seventh grade Metropolitan Achievement Tests revealed a mean gain in Reading and Total Reading to be 1.79 and 4.53 greater than the results of chance. The mean gain by students was three months; an improvement of seven months was shown in the Total Reading Mean Gain. The t-test for non-independent samples displayed a .01 level of significance in the achievement scores of students. Grade level equivalents disclosed a range of growth from a .7 to a +2.2 yearly gain. The Pearson Product (r) correlation coefficient revealed no correlation to be significant for the Reading subtest; however, a .61 slight correlation was significant at the .05 level for Total Reading achievement.

The attitude survey (Table 2) results showed an increase of 17% in the amount of time spent by students reading during their spare time, identified as one to three hours. An increase of 8% was noted in the amount of time and communication related to books involved in peer discussion. Five percent more of the students on the post-test designated themselves as "above-average readers."

Student questionnaires overwhelmingly stated a feeling of improvement in reading ability, along with 81% concluding an attitude change toward reading. Parents disclosed support of the program, with 88% observing a favorable attitude change toward reading by their child. The majority of the parents thought that their child had profited from the program; and 81% wished that their child could remain in the program for the following school year.

Teacher attitudes toward the program were very favorable, with an increase in services regarding the number of students served and classroom teacher assistance noted as suggestions for future program consideration.

Discussion

This study supports the conclusions of Moore, Jones, and Miller (1980) in concurring positive effect on reading achievement and attitudes toward reading. In evaluating compensatory reading programs, the objectives outlined by Alexander (1979) as successful factors in a reading program were demonstrated by the lab students; favorable reading attitudes and reading utilized as a leisure activity. In an informal class discussion, students did acknowledge personal increases in the average number of books read per school year. Since the M.A.T. is not a criterion referenced test, specific skill mastery could not be identified. In regards to the results, a prediction could be generated that a utilization of skills and an application of reading skills to the test did occur so that an increase in terms of achievement scores could be obtained. The silent reading practice did effect student achievement, supporting the belief of Smith (1978) that reading increases a reader's knowledge about reading itself.

Referring to the goals outlined by the Maryland State Department of Education, the students did indeed: utilize a variety of materials (goal 1); demonstrate comprehension of various materials, in relation to types of content reading on the M.A.T. (goal 3); select reading as a personal activity (goal 5); and increase in reading achievement, which will aid them in meeting the reading demands of society (goal 4).

Suggestions for Future Research

Reed's study (1978) with Secondary English students utilized a large classroom setting and a limited weekly schedule for silent reading practice. Einhorn's study (1979) was limited to 10 weeks of instructional time, again with regular classroom students in a large group setting. This study involved a small group of State Compensatory Program students practicing reading silently from self-selected available materials on a daily scheduled basis, perhaps with more resources available in the lab setting for student selection. It is these variables of group size, schedule, and an environment receptive to print immersion that could be possible factors of influence in silent reading practice and achievement correlation. An experimental design in a compensatory program utilizing a control group is suggested for future research, along with an investigation of the effects of the factors noted previously concerning size and schedule. The conclusion of Moore, Jones, and Miller (1980) for continued silent reading practice research is also supported in this study in order that teachers can acquire more knowledge about methods to increase students' success in learning to read and in reading.

TABLE 1

COMPARISON OF SEVENTH GRADE

METROPOLITAN ACHIEVEMENT TESTS RESULTS

| M.A.T. CATEGORY | N | PRETEST MEAN | POSTTEST MEAN | GAIN MEAN | t-TEST |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Reading | 34 | 17 | 20 | +3 | 2.76 |
| Total Reading | 34 | 36 | 43 | +7 | 4.09 |

| M.A.T. CATEGORY | N | PRETEST S.D. | POSTTEST S.D. | DIFFERENCE STANDARD DEVIATION (S.D.) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Reading | 34 | 4.13 | 5.81 | +1.( , |
| Total Reading | 34 | 8.32 | 11.80 | +3.48 |

NOTE: t-Test for Reading significant at .1; .05; and .01 levels.

t-Test for Total Reading significant at .1 and .05 levels.

Standard Error of Difference for Reading = 1.21.

Standard Error of Difference for Total Reading = 2.47.

TABLE 2

STUDENT ATTITUDE

SURVEY RESULTS

| QUESTION | RESPONSE | PRETEST | POSTTEST |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. How do you feel about reading for pleasure during summer vacation? | 1. Enjoy it | 65% | 44% |
| | 2. Do other things instead | 14% | 19% |
| | 3. It doesn't matter to me | 14% | 26% |
| | 4. I don't like it | 7% | 11% |
| 2. How often do you read for fun during your spare time? | 1. None | 41% | 25% |
| | 2. 1-3 hrs. | 38% | 55% |
| | 3. 3-6 hrs. | 12% | 17% |
| | 4. 6 hrs. + | 9% | 3% |
| 3. How would you rate yourself as a reader? | 1. above average | 16% | 21% |
| | 2. average | 63% | 63% |
| | 3. below average | 21% | 16% |
| 4. Do you understand the materials you are expected to read in school? | 1. sometimes | 47% | 44% |
| | 2. usually | 27% | 28% |
| | 3. always | 18% | 19% |
| | 4. seldom | 8% | 9% |

TABLE 2 (CON'T)

| QUESTION | RESPONSE | PRETEST | POSTTEST |
|---|---|---|---|
| 5. How often do you talk to your friends about interesting things you have read? | 1. sometimes | 38% | 46% |
| | 2. often | 32% | 28% |
| | 3. never | 16% | 13% |
| | 4. seldom | 14% | 13% |

NOTE: Survey based on questions from Maryland State Department of Education. See Bibliography.

TABLE 3

STUDENT SURVEY

PROGRAM EVALUATION

1. Do you feel that you were provided with the help you needed in reading by attending this program?

   88% yes  9% no  3% no reply

2. Do you think you have improved in reading?

   98% yes  2% no

3. Have you experienced a more favorable attitude toward reading?

   81% yes  19% no

4. Would you be in favor of requesting state funds to continue the existence of the reading lab?

   93% yes  7% no

5. If given the chance, would you like to attend the lab next year?

   52% yes  45% no  3% no reply

Additional Comments

1. The lab has helped me a lot this year.
2. I want to be in reading lab next year.
3. We are not learning the same thing as the regular class.
4. Give us harder work.
5. Have less kids in class.

TABLE 3 (CON'T)

6. I feel I have improved enough to be in regular class.
7. I feel I have improved.
8. Teacher gives more help than other teachers.
9. Buy comic books.
10. Get bigger desks.
11. Get a bigger room.
12. Buy more books.
13. Have two teachers in lab.
14. Get more sport books.

NOTE: Questions developed by Julia Habash and Dennise Bartelo.

TABLE 4

SUMMARY OF RESPONSES TO

PARENT QUESTIONNAIRE - PROGRAM EVALUATION

1. Do you feel that your child has benefitted from the instruction received in the program?

   100% yes  0% no

2. Do you feel that you have been informed adequately concerning your child's progress?

   88% yes  12% no

3. If you did contact the teacher, did you find the conference valuable and informative in discussing your child's performance?

   44% yes  6% no  38% no reply  12% no contact made

4. Have you observed a favorable change in attitude concerning your child's work and the subject matter of reading?

   88% yes  12% no

5. Would you like your child to continue in the program next year, if given the opportunity?

   81% yes  6% no  13% no reply

6. Would you be interested in becoming a parent volunteer?

   6% yes  82% no  12% no reply

TABLE 4 (CON'T)

7. Would you favor future requests of state funds to subsidize the program continuation for following years?

75% yes 6% no 19% no reply

Additional Comments

1. I didn't contact the teacher myself.
2. The conferences have been informative.
3. I truly believe that the program is well worth state funding, and hope it will be offered next year.
4. My child has been very successful in the program. It has greatly benefitted him.
5. No complaints.
6. No comments.
7. A bigger room would be helpful.

NOTE: Questionnaire developed by Julia Habash and Dennise Bartelo.

TABLE 5

TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE

PROGRAM EVALUATION

1. Has the reading lab been helpful to you in serving your remedial students?

   100% yes  0% no

2. Was the scheduling satisfactory, in relation to pulling students from the reading class for 50 minutes?

   100% yes  0% no

3. Have you observed any amount of skill improvement by those students who attend the lab?

   75% yes  0% no  25% no reply

4. How could the lab be of help to you next year?

   - more students served
   - more testing help
   - take the rest of my students
   - same way
   - more follow-up
   - no comment

TABLE 5 (CON'T)

5. Would you be in favor of meeting weekly from 3:00 - 3:30 to discuss student progress and program structure?

25% yes 75% no

6. Additional Comments

- need reading curriculum
- use special skill material on academic work
- I definitely saw improvement in the skills of my students
- teacher had well-planned activities; worked hard

NOTE: Questionnaire developed by Dennise Bartelo.

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